

A CONVERSATION

"OVERFLOWING WITH MEMORY"

On Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley's

"Water, Shoulders, Into the Black Pacific"

Jafari S. Allen, with Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley

During the opening discussion of the Black/Queer/Diaspora Work(ing) Group symposium in 2009, the literary theorist Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley began her remarks on her *GLQ* essay "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage" by invoking M. Jacqui Alexander's contention that "water overflows with memory . . . emotional memory, bodily memory, sacred memory."¹ This is one way to express the need to develop a black feminist epistemology to uncover submerged histories that traditional historiographies cannot, or will not, validate. In "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic," Tinsley frames the paucity of historical documentation and the need for creative responses as a legitimate way to represent black women's histories. Taking seriously Alexander's entreaty that "searchers must explore outside narrow conceptions of the 'factual' to get there . . . crossing several currents canalized in traditional scholarships, muddying divisions between documented and intuitive, material and metaphoric, past and present, so that 'who is remembered and how, is continually being transformed through a web of interpretive systems,'" Tinsley has contributed an excerpt from her historical novel, "Water, Shoulders, Into the Black Pacific," to this special issue. In doing so, she has also incited a rich and important debate among reviewers and editors, which was in some ways prefigured by the lively discussion members and friends of the Black/Queer/Diaspora Work(ing) Group engaged in during the initial con-

version of the two-day symposium. Thus I invited Omise'eke to talk with me about the piece—her inspiration, methodology, process, and political choices.²

Jafari S. Allen: So, my love, in the interest of what some may think of as “disclosure” and others will correctly understand as another instantiation of the love ethic of black/queer/diaspora, I must say at the outset that you are someone whom I have gotten to know through the black/queer/diaspora conference circuit over the past few years.³ I mention this because it speaks to the contentions that I made in the introduction (which your comments inspired me to amplify) about the distinct love ethic of black/queer/diaspora work and the erotic potential of these gatherings to bring people together in a way in which one can become, as you have become to me, *a friend of one's mind* and spirit. Your work in *Thieving Sugar* has already made a significant impact on the way we read Caribbean literature (and life), and your previous *GLQ* essay, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic,” likewise breached the levees of black diaspora studies and queer studies.⁴ The terrain is expanded and enriched in your wake. Nevertheless, we are *here*, in the ether of cyberspace, to talk about another aspect of your work—I almost said “a departure,” but I do not think it is, really.

Would you talk about the methodological and theoretical provenance or genealogy of the excerpt from “Water, Shoulders, Into the Black Pacific” printed here, please? After reading it for the first time, my mind went to Saidiya Hartman's work, not only “Venus in Two Acts” but also the ways in which her *Scenes of Subjection* reads against the grain of existing archives, and in doing so reveals both what you can get from existing records—even very problematic ones—and incisively raises the question of the *impossibility* of knowing some of the particularities of historical experience and subjectivity.⁵ Of course here, M. Nourbese Philips's *Zong!* comes to mind also, as does the notion of a spectral queer subjectivity haunting the archive and the literatures produced through it, for example, that our fierce departed brister Vincent [Woodard] theorized in his work on shape-shifting in African American literature and folklore.⁶ “Water, Shoulders, Into the Black Pacific” seems to be one possible answer to all of this, and of course, to Hortense Spillers and Barbara Smith and Makeda Silvera, and even Evelyn Hammonds, for example, who called for representations of black women's sexuality—their erotic experiences.⁷ And your teacher, Barbara Christian, whom I know you credit with inspiring this work. This is a great tribute to her, I think. Here I see you attempting to revindicate the theoretics of those who in Christian's words “have always been a race for theory.”⁸ One of the most important things you do here,

alongside the warm embrace of your language, and the sort of *drylongso* quality of everyday life you illustrate in soft tones—it is so sweetly crafted and so like life—is its subtle provocation to look farther (and further), deeper, and elsewhere. I know that I have said a lot here, but I also know that you are sometimes shy or reticent about laying out the profundity of what you have done, so I thought I'd get the ball rolling! Yes, please talk a bit about the methodological and theoretical provenance or genealogy of "Water, Shoulders, Into the Black Pacific."

Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley: My self-questioning intensified as I read new scholarship exploring the particular importance of imaginative work in theorizing the intimacies that women of color participate in and contest. Recent black feminist criticism, including the beautiful new writing of M. Jacqui Alexander and Saidiya Hartman, argues persuasively that to tell meaningful stories of black womanhood—and particularly black women's sexuality—traditional scholarship, and especially academic work that relies on the archive, can never suffice.⁹ While archives may be a point of departure, they posit, scholars must turn to creative methodologies to intuit and imagine narratives of black women's freedom: a freedom that has remained an impossibility in official discourses but that must be invented *even where it did not exist* in the past, in order that it might exist in the future. In the poignant article "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman writes of her own attempt to imagine relationships between female captives in the Middle Passage that the intent of such imaginative scholarly work is "to imagine what cannot be verified . . . to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance. . . . It is a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive."¹⁰ "Water, Shoulders, Into the Black Pacific" also dives into such a (counter)history. Taking seriously that there are things conventional historical or literary scholarship cannot accomplish in telling the complex, elided stories of gender, desire, and personhood in the African diaspora, my creative theorizing asks questions whose very value might be that they have no "real" answer. What else can black women desire besides what the archive documents? Where else can blackness imagine itself besides the Atlantic?

But of course, like these writers, I too began in formal archives. I pored through transcripts from the Regional Oral History Office at the University of California, Berkeley; made my way through records housed at the Richmond Museum, including private photos, newsletters, ship launching programs, and videotaped interviews; and scoured historiographies about the East Bay during World War II. I learned that between 1942 and 1945, Richmond became a hub of the black

Pacific as Henry Kaiser erected four shipyards in the once sleepy town and sent recruiters to the South to lure women to California. Arriving by trainloads, African Americans, Creoles, Pueblos, and Chinese swelled Richmond's population in a unique wave of female migration from Louisiana and the peri-Caribbean Gulf states that permanently changed the state's racial demographics and temporarily changed its gender dynamics, garnering women of color unprecedented earning power. In interview transcripts, I found stories about newly economically independent female shipbuilders leaving husbands, taking casual male lovers, or staying single because they now could.

The archives I consulted also included previous work by, for example, Gretchen Lemke Santangelo (*Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the East Bay Community*); Shirley Ann Wilson Moore (*To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910–1963*); and Marilyn S. Johnson (*The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II*), following their leads to other sources.¹¹ My immediate, completely unfounded assumption after reading about relationships between women in the shipyards was that this shipboard sex was between female shipbuilders—those who returned to make the ships work for them in off-hours. So I excitedly set out in search of an interview transcript about same-sex shipboard erotics, hoping to find a story that I would then analyze as part of my emerging project on queering African diaspora oceanographies. This proved a fantasy. I never found the story of same-sex desire that I set out in search of—the story that I was sure must be part of this queer, ethnically messy, gender-troubling wave of migration. And because I couldn't find it in the archives, I finally decided that the most challenging academic project I could undertake would be to write that story myself: to write historical fiction that would draw from oral histories to imagine intersections of migration, work, and desire experienced by African and Caribbean American women who came from the Mississippi Delta to the San Francisco Bay to work in Kaiser's shipyards.

The novel, titled “Water, Shoulders, Into the Black Pacific,” follows three female protagonists, Louisiana Creole, southern African American, and black Filipina shipbuilders who come through intersecting diasporas to work with, sleep with, compete with, dream of each other in strange ways that lace Atlantic, Caribbean, Mississippian, and Philippine Sea histories through their daily conflicts and desires. These are Serena, a woman of Haitian descent who moves to Richmond from New Orleans, where her mixed race renders her ambiguous to those around her; her lover Johnnie, an African American from Tennessee who, in a new state and profession, experiments with passing as a man; and Caridad, daughter of

a Buffalo soldier and a Filipina, who finds herself attracted to Serena and her relationship with Johnnie. These characters move as part of different but overlapping diasporas—Caribbean, African, and Asian—and their interactions evoke common histories and tensions between these groups, whose members have both crossed paths and been set at odds in North American racial landscapes.

My focus on African American shipbuilders—women who spent their days together in ships' holds and on ships' decks not as captives but as workers and, who knows, perhaps did return there at night to drink, dance, and re-create—is not only an interest in a particular moment of black Pacific history. It is an inquiry into how this moment at once continues and rewrites earlier, painful histories of black women packed side by side on ships where they nevertheless forged community. How does the warship that women construct at once echo and figuratively dismantle the slave ship that constructed them as property? What are the historical and cultural implications for African diaspora studies when we record black women as shipbuilders rather than shipmates—or, more accurately, as shipbuilders and shipmates rather than cargo? How are the community-building structures elaborated during enslavement reconfigured to build new kinds of alliances and tensions between women arriving from differently situated (Creole, African American, Asian American, indigenous) experiences of a common continent?

But of course Kaiser's shipbuilders were not building slave ships but US Navy battleships, so-called victory and liberty ships, and this novel about their work is also a counternarrative to tropes of American empire. Perhaps even more tidally, though, the idea of imagining not only female shipbuilders but also black queer female shipbuilders captivated me in its potential to dramatically disrupt the gendered, racial, and sexual divisions of empire that the image of the battleship is supposed to solidify like iron. What would it mean not only to displace white male masculinity from the ship's helm but to choose as a new narrative focus neither the brown male masculinity nor the white female femininity. What if we envision black female masculinity, black queer femininity, and other nonnormative racialized genders building and boarding the battleship? Such envisioning would open space that resists easy gendered mappings which might automatically position blackness, queerness, and femininity on the side of resistance to power; after all, shipbuilders were literally in the belly of the imperial machine, and their mobility to the Pacific coast was both because of and despite the imperial mobility of US militarism during and after World War II. Here we see the ships from the point of view of black bulldaggers, Creole femmes, or black Filipinas as they climb scaffolding and weld the hold.

My decision to write fiction—a challenging one, which I've compared to

jumping off a cliff—emerged out of a commitment to black feminist praxis: to black feminism not as an identity politics but as a critical lens, one that demands constant interrogation of how we (public intellectuals) constitute and communicate knowledge. As a graduate student, I was profoundly influenced by my teacher Barbara Christian's response to the elitism of hegemonic feminism and by her call to take black women's creative work as seriously as self-consciously theoretical texts. I long ago memorized the passage in "The Race for Theory" in which she asks:

For people of color have always theorized. . . . And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and in proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. How else have we managed to survive with such spiritedness the assaults on our bodies, social institutions, countries, our very humanities?¹²

Following this call, my book, *Thieving Sugar*, engages black women's literary productions as theoretical texts, reading Caribbean poetry and fiction—ranging from anonymous songs to plagiarized novels to prize-winning poetry collections—as narrative theorizing about race, colonialism, sexuality, and gender. But I began to wonder whether I was taking Christian's idea far enough, and whether there was not still an underpinning of elitism in my practice—which read narrative theorizing as work that other black women performed, but one in which I, as an academic, did not participate. In replicating this traditional literary-critical division of labor, was there still something lingering of that split between body (the feelingness, the messiness of fiction) and mind (the pseudo-objectivity, the "order" of criticism) that Christian showed to be so devastating to black women from slavery onward? What, really, was stopping me from becoming a narrative theorist?

JSA: Indeed. I find this fascinating, and inspirational, as I also attempt to take seriously Christian's foundational entreaty, in my ethnographic practice, but in a different way, of course. This seems to me to be so important to push forward, all at once: on the one hand, Spillers's notion of "first order naming," which happens through perhaps more traditional social science and history; and, on the other, frontally challenging this, which finds black queers and insurgent women "word poor" in the academic realm while we have so much word wealth (perhaps not invested well?) in our communities.¹³ A number of related questions of methodology came up during the initial discussion at the symposium. After I made intro-

ductions, Natalie [Bennett] made this important intervention, which we returned to several times:

I was thinking about the way that you introduced everybody in terms of our individual biographies, and it raised the question: what does interdisciplinarity mean in the production of Black queer theories? Or Black queer studies proper? I am thinking about all the stuff that I teach in "Genders and Sexualities in the Caribbean": although I trained as a sociologist, I have always used novels to do particular things. However, I am also finding that we seem to be moving very quickly toward novels and fictional works [in our teaching and theorizing], because it allows certain kinds of thinking and imagining. Part of what has been happening . . . in our individual work, is a *retreat*—or perhaps what I mean is more like a *fleeing to* fiction—a particular kind of imagining, and away from making the material conditions of Black queer lives more central to our thinking and theorizing.

I remember feeling some folks bristle a bit when Natalie offered this. *A retreat, or a fleeing*. Provocative, yes? Very evocative, too. And of course she is saying this as someone who, in her teaching, reaches outside sociology to literature to *do the work*—perhaps of revealing black queer subjectivities—that sociology does not, will not, or cannot do (it is interesting that ethnography does not do this for her—my hope for ethnographies of black queer experience is that it someday will). Like me, Natalie "wonder(s) if some of those questions, or what it is that we are using literature to do, cannot also be reproduced in other kinds of spaces." Other social scientists in the room—Natalie, Rinaldo [Walcott], who trained as a sociologist but really works interdisciplinarily as a critical cultural studies scholar, and I—wanting to push social scientists to join the work, since I don't see this as an either-or proposition—were likewise concerned that we not let social science off the hook, apropos of the unique gifts it could bring to the black/queer/diaspora project. You asked us to consider

what sort of work does literature do in the academy? What does it mean to not only read literature as theory but to read sociology as literature—what kind of critique of knowledge production can happen there? But another question that I think it might be interesting to think more about while we are together is: what is the role of literature in particular and art in general in social justice movements?

Given this, and given all the work we depend on literature to do—and please let me know whether you think this question is not precise to this conversation, or to reframe it—what are the limits of literature?

ONT: My answer is quite simple: there are no limits to what literature can do. None. And I can say that because I consider that whenever creativity is expressed through writing of any kind, literature is produced. So then, yes, not only social sciences but physical and biological sciences, too, I think of as literature. Because how much phenomenal creativity does it take to research the human genome, for example, and then put that into language? And I say this not to be literature-centric in a naive way, not at all. I say this following Sylvia Wynter's critique of the divisions of academic disciplines, which split apart, colonize, and hierarchize knowledges that are in fact powerfully connected—knowledges of what Wynter calls *the human* that span art, biology, sociology, and on and on and on, but that the academy atomizes.¹⁴ So for me it is with deep respect and an anticolonial political engagement that I consider physics and sociology to be a kind of literature . . . and yes, of course, if physicists were to call literature a science, I would find that beautiful, too.

JSA: I have to say this: while two of the reader reports for your excerpt (from important literary scholars) were as glowing as my own (gushing) assessment of your work, an objection we heard from one of the reviewers (another literary scholar) and from a historian was that *one cannot in fact supplement history with invented narratives*. The very question is fascinating and telling, in the context of an interdisciplinary journal, and in the context of a special issue like ours, which claims to propose something “new.” For me, the question seems to reveal a less-than-critical dependence on “history” as an unproblematic and transparent endeavor, which is striking to me as an anthropologist, because of anthropology's by-now-elaborate self-critique (if not self-correction); it's at least a rhetorical gesture toward its kinship with, for example, travel writing, journalism, and fiction; and its making room for experimental modes of ethnography, within and outside anthropology. There seems to be some high-end policing of the borders of history. During our black/queer/diaspora symposium, Rosamond S. King commented that “I think it's very much about disciplinarity, because you can, in a comparative literature department, do a reading of lesbians and slavery. You can do a reading of nineteenth-century Trinidadian Jammettes, for instance [as she has brilliantly done], much more easily, I think, than you can do a dissertation in history on those things.”¹⁵ But the policing is not only by historians. These issues also came up, more generally, at our first roundtable discussion. I think that many of us feel very

strongly, as Michelle [Wright] said during the roundtable, that "in many ways history is the most important discipline," so perhaps we all want to *protect it*? Is that it? One of the comments asserted:

Most certainly, historians would have a problem with an argument that, even after some citations and analysis, can be read as suggesting black women should be free to create their histories as a replacement for documented narratives.

During the roundtable, you and Matt [Richardson] seemed to be presenting a much more nuanced argument about archives and history and imagination than this (supportive) critic allows. Of course, your comments above begin to show the complex theoretical-methodological nexus at work here. *How do you respond to this?*

ONT: I am very struck by this reviewer's language critiquing the idea of black women *being free to create their histories*. Well, why shouldn't we be? This takes me back to Sylvia Wynter again, and to other African diaspora scholars who have critiqued the idea that descendants of enslaved Africans have achieved freedom—and who, like the beloved Barbara Christian, have pointed to the fetters on *what we can even imagine* as a measure of this continued unfreedom. No one is talking about replacing documented narratives, but can we put other kinds of knowledges in conversation with these, and if not, *how very unfree are we???* If, as Barbara wrote, people of color have always theorized—and, I'd add, historicized—through narrative, why can't we count fiction, its meditations on history, the undocumented voices that it hears, as another strand to add to our histories? If I know that it's true that women loved each other on those ships in Richmond but no documentation "proves" this, should I continue to pass over this fact in silence—as the love of black people and women for each other has always, always, violently been silenced? Or should I be free to create something where there has only been silence? If anyone told my daughter that she's unfree to re-create her history—to tell herself the stories that she needs to hear—I would be as angry as if they told her that she was unfree to create her future. Because, in effect, that's what they'd be telling her.

JSA: We were also fortunate to have my colleague, the gay and lesbian historian George Chauncey, join that first conversation at the symposium.¹⁶ George has been very supportive of the black/queer/diaspora project as an important part of our work in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender studies at Yale, and it was important to have his perspective as someone who does not explicitly do black

diaspora work. During the discussion George was onboard with the points that you and Matt were making about the roles that fiction, literature, filmmaking, performance art, and so forth can play in suggesting new imaginative possibilities to us, and how communities can form and find themselves through this. But I think that the tougher epistemological question for him—and this is fair, I think—revolved around historical specificity and the responsibilities of historians and (other) social scientists. Matt had been talking about Cheryl Muhanji's *Her*, and the importance of that novel, after which George brought up the fact that there has been some archival research done on black Detroit and gay Detroit in the forties and fifties. George worried about how we can start adjudicating truth claims being made by various accounts of that scene. The question remains: (how) do we reimagine a historical narrative and framework through fiction?

ONT: Well, while I don't know exactly how to answer that question—because, really, there should be as many answers as there are works of historical fiction—I will say this. I think the idea that there's a single, "objective" truth that should or even could be represented in fiction is a very dangerous one. Of course, some people may want to write about things they know to have been true (in whatever way that truth works for them). And others may want to write about things that *could have been true* in the past—freedoms, loves, that *could have been* lived—in the hopes that this imagination will make it possible for them to become true in the future. Because, as you've so beautifully said, crying out for "no future" just isn't for people of African descent; we've been slated for no future since the door of no return. So we need alternatives to that painful, slaveheld past that colonial and plantation records so precisely and soul-crushingly document for us, in order to create alternatives to the living deaths that are supposed to be our future.

JSA: Michelle [Wright], in her comments on "disturbing dominant epistemologies in the academy," referenced, from her position as a literary scholar, the import of history and the problem, therefore, of black/queer/diaspora scholarship with reference to the larger academy and to established archives. She said:

I always go back to a poster a good friend of mine had in college of Malcolm X, where he says that history is the most important of all disciplines. As a literature person I even agreed with that. And I think possibly that may be because I see history as so many different things. It is a narrative, it is a series of facts, it is a way of re-imagining. . . . African-American literature has to operate as a kind of social science even as it is an imagining, because you are aware that you are writing to a dominant group, and you have to negotiate these knowledges.

She talked about requiring her literature students to go to primary historical texts in libraries and archives to become immersed in the particularities of the context of the works of fiction she assigns, and through this articulation, pushing students to see the paradoxes in heteronormative bourgeois epistemologies—which she suggests is the work of queer studies.

Offering another perspective on disciplinary border-crossing, Rosamond S. King, who has traveled to places and interacted with folks whom ethnographers have yet to engage, offered:

I know that for myself I would probably benefit more from the discipline of sociology because I come from places (comparative literature) where I did not have the opportunity to do things like that. I do not know how to do that. And how many other people are going to have the opportunity . . . to, for instance go to the Gambia. So if I had the opportunity, I should take advantage of it, and yet I don't want to do it badly, right? [at which point in the conversation Rinaldo and I interrupted her to say "Don't worry about that," and "Just get the stories documented"]. So I find myself find myself in this interdisciplinary role, and yet not quite sure of what I'm doing.

Of course, after directing social scientists to read more novels (and he could have said also see more performances, write more poetry, drink more homemade sangria, grow more okra . . .), Rinaldo helped bring together some of the streams that had been flowing in our discussion. And while this discussion was about methodology, it was always also—I think we all understood this—also about theory, and about ethics, as Rosamond averred. Rinaldo said that the kind of work that he wants to imagine he is doing, and the kinds of questions that he wants to ask, are in large part precisely material and embodied. We all agreed. He offered:

And so . . . what is at stake in theory, what is at stake in conceptualizing this term, this word that way . . . seems to call for a range of different kinds of methods, and a range of different kinds of objects of study. In some of them we are going to sit down and talk to real live people and in some of them we are going to retreat to the novel, the poem, the play, music, and some of them we're going to retreat to spirituality.

And yes, m'dear Omi, in my thinking Rinaldo is one of the most devotedly secular of black diaspora theorists, so you and I may need to massage his sort of "agnosticism" [ha!] around the spiritual and the spectral. And there is that "retreat" again. Interesting. "But . . ." he said,

It seems to me that all of them have to be on the table in different kinds of ways at different kinds of times, and we have to be juggling with them. I always say to my students, if you are going to be an interdisciplinary scholar, it means you have given yourself the most difficult job in the academy to do. You have to do all of that. You have got to account for all of it.

Because I love Rinaldo and know that he will, at once, blush and roll his eyes when he sees this in print, I will add to his statement: Pranam/Ase/Axe/Amen!

ONT: Well, with his beautiful eyes rolling or not, I must say I completely, deeply agree with Rinaldo about the practice of interdisciplinarity. *And, but*—my agreement comes only if we're willing to expand our idea about "disciplines" of knowledge, and maybe even change that "d" word to something else. Instead, I like to think of deepening *currents* of knowledge and, then, creating crosscurrents between them. And to decolonize the epistemologies we're crosscurrenting, I think it's crucial to think of orisha stories and vèvès—of ring songs and shouts—of hair braiding and barbering—yes, of growing okra and working herbs—as currents of knowledge that need to be brought into the cross, in order to more fully articulate all the possible ways we (we, people of African descent, we, just plain people) have of knowing the world. To me, that's no retreat; and, since I can't deal in teleologies, it's no advance, either. To me, it's an ocean-blue circle coming back around, and fuller this time.

JSA: Pranam, sister. Thank you.

ONT: Thanks and love to you, Jafari. Ase, Ase, Ase o.

Notes

1. M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 292; Omise'oke Natasha Tinsley, "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage," *GLQ* 14, nos. 2–3 (2008): 191–215.
2. This dialogue is reconstituted from electronic correspondence between Tinsley and me, as well as transcription and notes from the public first session of the Black/Queer/Diaspora Work(ing) Group symposium (April 17–18, 2009). At that time, we sought to "warm up" our time together by bringing our individual interests, projects, and locations to the table. The "voices" and my own impression of the comments of Natalie Bennett, George Chauncey, Rosamond S. King, Rinaldo Walcott, and Michelle Wright were culled from this discussion.

3. We met at the "epic" Chicago conference on black and Latina/o sexualities in spring 2007, where I learned a lot from Omi—who was wearing the most beautiful thigh-high, soft leather stiletto boots—and from Lamonda H. Stallings, Marlon Bailey, Mireille Miller-Young, and a host of others during their papers, and at the bar, in hallways, and in hotel rooms where ad hoc workshops on black queer studies unfolded. Later, after the Yale symposium, Omi and I presented together, with Xavier and Matt, in London at Goldsmith's "Race and the Modern World" conference, April 2008; and I heard her paper on Erzulie poetics in everyday life of queer Haitian men, on a sterling panel with Dagmawi Woubshet and Jax Cuevas, at Syracuse University's conference "Transnationalizing LGBT Studies," LGBT Studies Program, September 2010; later, Omi, Matt, and I presented a panel at the Caribbean Studies Association meeting in Barbados, May 2010, where Natalie Bennett, Rosamond S. King, and Angelique 999 led the creation of a new Sexualities Interest Group of the international organization. All of this speaks to the myriad ways and means by which black/queer/diaspora work happens.
4. Omi's eke Natasha Tinsely, *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
5. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): 1–14, and Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
6. M. Nourbese Philip, *Zong!* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008); Vincent Woodard, "The Shapeshifter Figure: A New Cartography of Sex and Gender Formation within Radical Black Antebellum Culture," PhD diss, University of Texas, Austin.
7. Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Barbara Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism," *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (1979): 183–94; Makeda Silvera, "May Royals and Sodomites: Some Thoughts on the Invisibility of Afro-Caribbean Lesbians," *Feminist Studies* 18, no. 3 (1992): 521–32; Evelyn Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality," in *The Black Studies Reader*, ed. Jacqueline Bobo, Cynthia Hudley, and Claudine Michel (New York: Routledge, 2004).
8. Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," *Cultural Critique* 6 (Spring 1987): 52.
9. See Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*; and Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).
10. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.
11. Gretchen Lemke Santangelo, *Abiding Courage: African American Migrant Women and the East Bay Community* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, *To Place Our Deeds: The African American Community in Richmond, California, 1910–1963* (Berkeley: University of California

- Press, 2000); Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
12. Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory," in *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1990), 336.
 13. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, 154.
 14. See, for example, Sylvia Winter, "On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory, and Reimprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being, of Desêtre: Black Studies Toward the Human Project" in Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, *A Companion to African-American Studies* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).
 15. Rosamond S. King, "Jamette Women's Double Cross: Creating an Archive," *Women and Performance* 11, no. 1, 203–10.
 16. George's scholarship in fact has significantly pushed traditional twentieth-century American history to recognize lesbian and gay history.